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SUBJECT: LITHUANIAN PARLIAMENT OUSTS SPEAKER; GOVERNING
COALITION APPEARS SECURE

REF: VILNIUS 459

¶1. SUMMARY: Lithuania's Seimas (parliament) on September 15 voted to remove TV showman Arunas Valinskas from the Speaker's chair he had held for almost a year. The vote followed media reports that Valinskas associated with and perhaps used his government post to do favors for an organized crime figure. The change, along with a split within Valinskas' political party, has prompted negotiations over the composition of the governing coalition, but the Conservative-led government of Prime Minister Kubilius is expected to remain in power. End summary.

¶2. On September 15, 95 of the 139 members of the Lithuanian Seimas voted to oust Valinskas, less than a year after he and his celebrity-laden National Revival Party exceeded all expectations and finished third in parliamentary elections last fall. The party has acrimoniously disintegrated and now has two feuding factions in the Seimas, neither of which has kept the National Revival name. The no-confidence vote on Valinskas came after media reported that he had had frequent contact with a convicted criminal who was part of an organized-crime group in Kaunas, Lithuania's second-largest city. Lithuania's largest daily newspaper reported in August that Valinskas had, on behalf of his acquaintance, sought information about an investigation into the group. Valinskas said he will keep his seat in the Seimas.

¶3. First deputy speaker Irena Degutiene has become acting speaker, and is favored by all parties in the ruling coalition to replace Valinskas. Valinskas said his seven-member Oak Faction would remain in the coalition. One of the 13 members of the Lithuania United Faction, which also was part of National Revival, told us his faction was officially out of the coalition, but was in negotiations with the Conservative Party to rejoin. When National Revival was united, it controlled two Cabinet positions. Whether either of the factions will keep those posts now, or whether there will be a redistribution of Cabinet posts, remains uncertain as negotiations continue.

¶4. Comment: Even without the Lithuania United faction, the Conservative-led governing coalition has 71 of the 141 seats in the Seimas (which currently has two vacancies). Although the leader of the opposition told reporters that he was exploring the possibility of forming a different coalition, it appears unlikely that the Kubilius government will lose its hold on power, or be inclined to change any of its positions, which are generally very pro-American. The vote on Valinskas was about one personality, not about policy. End summary.

LEADER